

Testimony in Support of S.B. 991, An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Workers

By

Stephen R. Smith, M.D., M.P.H.
To the Human Services Committee

Dear Senator Matthew, Representative Gilcrest, and esteemed members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Stephen R. Smith, M.D., and I live in New London, Connecticut. I work as a family physician at the Community Health Center in New London and see how important community health workers could be every day in my practice serving mostly Husky patients. Take colonoscopies, for example. All too often my patients either don't show up for their appointments for their colonoscopy or arrive poorly prepped, resulting in an inadequate examination. I have spoken with gastroenterologists who say that it isn't the reimbursement rate from Medicaid that discourages them from taking Husky patients, rather it is the high rate of no-shows and improperly prepped patients. A community health worker could reach out to these patients before their scheduled appointments to instruct them on the proper preparation and to encourage them to keep their appointment. Being from the same communities, these community health workers are trusted by the patients. Project Health in New Haven was able to demonstrate that using community health workers achieved a success rate for colonoscopies that exceeded 90 per cent.

Diabetes and hypertension are another scourge that afflicts our Medicaid patients. Community health workers can help patients adhere to their treatment regimens and keep their appointments with their primary care providers. As I tell the medical students who work with me, it isn't the science that's difficult; rather, it is the myriad social, economic, behavioral, and structural barriers that are the real challenge to me and my fellow providers of health care. Community health workers can help my patients unravel the tangle of transportation problems, child care issues, employer requirements, medical jargon, and scheduling hurdles that frequently lead to frustration and resignation in the patients.

If I were to be granted one wish for better health care for my patients, it wouldn't be for some new miracle drug; rather, I'd wish for ten community health workers to help me and my colleagues at the Community Health Center in New London help our patients achieve the highest level of health possible. You can make my wish come true by supporting S.B. 991.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen R. Smith", with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Stephen R. Smith, M.D.